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Sports: More than a Game

The Economic, Social, and Emotional Impacts of Sports in the United States

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Abstract

For over a century, sports have been a staple in entertaining the citizens of the United States, whether it be someone watching his or her favorite sport or participating in them. Baseball, Basketball, Football, and many other games originated in here in the U.S have gained mass popularity as the decades have gone by. Other games such as Soccer, Tennis, and Golf are popular sports that came to America with immigrants who played them in their former countries. From their unique beginnings, all of these sports have changed and evolved throughout the years, but all have continued to rise in playability, interest, and marketing potential.

Over the course of this piece, I will examine in depth the many different ways that sports have forever shaped and changed our nation, especially in its economic, social, and emotional aspects. Sports have become more than a game, something closer to a phenomenon. We see sports in television, and in fact we have entire television networks that are devoted to covering all things sports on an around-the-clock basis. Many of us have grown up in a world where sports have been a part of our lives to some degree, and we have most likely even participated in them at some point. Many people list some of their inspirational life figures as famous athletes, whether it be Michael Jordan, Muhamad Ali, Joe Montana or anyone else that they have cheered for over the years. Sports have become more and more commercialized since their humble beginnings, and Americans have spent trillions of dollars in order to satisfy all of their sporting needs.

Ticket costs, purchasing equipment, buying television packages, and traveling to see favorite teams are all sources of spending that have come from the pockets of American sports enthusiasts, and these have been sources of money that have turned the sports industry into the

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global monetary giant that it is today. Finally, some people tie sports into their lives just like others would do with a religion. To millions of people, sports are more than just a game or a hobby, but rather a way of life. Sports have molded the social landscape of this country and have influenced the lives of millions of Americans. Throughout this piece, I will provide insight to all of these aspects and others to show how much sports really mean to this country and its people.

Discussion

Celebrity Endorsement has always generated extra revenue for the companies that take that route in marketing and advertising, and in the sports world, it is no different. Giant sporting goods brands such as Nike, Under Armour, Adidas, and others have taken advantage of this tactic by paying top athletes in individual sports to endorse the product that they are trying to sell. These brands also have found ways to appeal to larger audiences by manufacturing quality equipment for multiple sports and then using multiple endorsements from different star athletes for each product.

For example, one need only to examine the practices of Under Armour. They produce sporting good apparel for both basketball and golf enthusiasts alike. They use the celebrity athlete endorsements of both Stephen Curry, a popular NBA player, and Jordan Spieth, an up and coming star on the PGA tour, for their lines of products that pertain to each sport. In fact, Stephen Curry even endorses his own line of signature shoes through Under Armour that he uses every night on the court. Some companies like Under Armour endorse multiple athletes, and some athletes are endorsed by multiple companies. One of the clearest examples of an athlete who held multiple endorsements was Tiger Woods (Feloni, 2015).

Tiger Woods was the face of multiple companies that were golf and sport related such as Nike, Titleist, and his own Tiger Woods line of apparel. Tiger was also the spokesman for companies that had nothing to do with the game, but just needed a superstar to get behind their products. Some of these companies include Buick Motors, American Express, and Wheaties. At the height of his career, Woods was averaging over one hundred million dollars in annual endorsement contract revenue. Having Woods as the man behind these certain brands generated

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record revenue increase for each company, all due to his influence as a celebrity athlete (Kelley, 2016).

Woods is not the only athlete who has reaped the benefits of landing multiple endorsement deals. Michael Jordan, who is perhaps the most popular NBA player in league history has been the benefactor of over ten different endorsing companies over the course of his fifteen-year career. The most notable of those companies, like in the case with Tiger Woods, is the Nike brand. In 1984, Michael Jordan signed a deal with Nike for \$500,000 a year to wear the brand's line of sneakers on the court. As of Today, Jordan was said to have made up to \$100 million dollars for a deal signed in 2016. This extreme payout, in addition to all of the money Nike has paid out to Jordan over the course of his career might seem excessive, but it has resulted into Nike dominating the United States basketball shoe market year after year (Rovell, 2013).

In the 2015 fiscal year, Jordan Brand shoes, a Nike exclusive line, owned a 64% share of the market, and Jordan's personal line of sneakers, the "Air Jordan" shoes, generated over 3 billion dollars for Nike in one year. This impressive share and monetary market growth is comparable to other popular brands who round out the rest of the market. Nike-proper, which relates to all things Nike that aren't under the Jordan name, claimed an impressive 29% alone. In 2015 Under Armour, the brand who stands on the shoulders of Steph Curry, raked in a paltry 3.6%, and Adidas collected the remaining sales at 2.3%. As one can see, with the appeal of celebrity athlete endorsements a company or product could turn into a multiyear, or in Nike's case with Jordan, a multi decade investment that brings in billions of dollars' worth of sales annually (Badenhausen, 2016).

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Why is celebrity endorsement so successful? In the case of sports, it is about utilizing the emotions of the fans. Children who were growing up learning to play the game of golf in the early 2000's all wanted to hit the same balls, use the same clubs, and wear the same clothes as Tiger Woods. To a great deal of the golfing world, Tiger was a heroic icon of the time, and players wanted to capture a piece of him in the equipment that they used so they could be "just like him," This principal also applies to the sneakers that Michael Jordan sells, to the baseball cleats that Derek Jeter wore, to the Tennis rackets Roger Federer uses.

Everyone who is a sports fan can relate to having a favorite athlete, and when it comes to choosing a brand of equipment to use for these athlete admirers, there is simply no other choice than to choose the brand that one's hero uses. Besides utilizing the emotions of their market audience, companies also seem to think that using a celebrity endorsement will add a new sense of credibility to the brand name and the products that they sell. For example, if players are debating on which type of sporting equipment to purchase and they see that a current star player who has a positive image and a sense of trustworthiness to them uses a particular brand, they might be swayed to pick that brand opposed to others because of this principle: "if an expert like Tiger Woods uses Nike, the so should I!"

Buyers will begin to think that if the athletes who are on top of the world use certain brands, it must be because those athletes only use the best lines of equipment to help them in their success, therefore said brand is surely a quality product. This sense of product credibility is not limited to sports related companies. For example, some athletes are paid to represent razor companies, insurance agencies, shampoo brands, and even cell phone providers. This sense of product validity and increasing brand credibility is all thanks to athlete endorsements. When athletes branch out from primary sports companies to promote, they not only help boost product

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validity, but they also create brand awareness by placing a famous face on the products that these businesses sell and broaden their market reach by using sports icons that appeal specifically to a new audience that might not have been reached otherwise.

Just as an athlete's endorsement can be taken as a trustworthy source of credibility due to their skills and character, it can also take a negative toll on certain companies when a prominent face associated with that company becomes involved in scandalous behaviors. When Tiger Wood's marital infidelity became public, many companies dropped Woods as their endorsed star in order to protect the company image and sales. If a man like Tiger could reel in billions of dollars in sales, it is also possible that a company could suffer in sales to a similar degree when endorsing a figure who has become a polarizing character. According to the UC Davis Grad School, Tiger's scandals in 2009 cost shareholders who held stock in the brands that he promoted a collective twelve billion dollars. The companies that Tiger held endorsements with such as Nike, Gillette, Buick experienced a 2.3% drop in market shares over night, and Tigers closest connected companies such as Tiger Woods brand golf and the PGA tour suffered an additional six billion dollars in losses as well (Akin, Nikos, 2009).

Shareholders did not begin to earn profit until Woods took a leave of absence from the PGA Tour, and several companies dropped him from their image that same month in December 2009. This only goes to further prove just how valuable of an asset a star athlete can be and how much sport players impact our nation's markets and economy.

If the characters of endorsed athletes can negatively affect brands, they can also be used to promote brands if the athlete has a positive public image. For example, when Nike endorses top athletes such as Tiger Woods (before his scandal), Michael Jordan, and LeBron James, it creates the image that Nike is a brand that promotes excellence and top notch performance from

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its products. When a brand such as State Farm endorses Aaron Rodgers, they want to portray that they are reliable and can perform for their clients on a professional level. Under Armour endorses Stephen Curry not only because of his impressive play, but because Stephen's rise to fame has been a road of overcoming obstacles and hard work paying off. Under Armour uses those ideals to appeal to their customers in addition to Stephen's performance.

Celebrity Endorsements can be a very lucrative option for sports vendors to choose. It can result in long term success and can generate billions of dollars in profit, which of course is reflected in American economic activity, thus further attributing to the fact that the world of sports has a major impact on America's annual GDP.

To dive even deeper into the world of sales, star athletes who endorse products are not the only source of monetary gain. Another way that the world of sports creates sales in the market is by selling a team name. Sports fans love to show their support of their favorite teams by dressing head to toe in gear that shows the love they have for their team. One prime example of this can be seen right here in our great state of Kentucky. Shirts, hoodies, sweaters, caps, car decals, golf accessories, keychains, and wallets are just a few examples of how using a team's name or logo can generate sales. This is an effect that is not limited to just Kentucky Basketball. All across the country there are different teams from different sports that have fan bases similar to those in Kentucky. The National Sporting Goods Association conducted a study in 2009 that concluded that American consumers spent over eight billion dollars on sports apparel alone that year (W, J, 2013).

This can also tie back into celebrity endorsed goods, due to the fact that many fans will purchase their favorite player's jersey or brand of shoes as a way to show their support for that team and or that specific player. According to makemoneyinlife.com, the average American spends around

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\$725 annually on sports related products alone. This study also concluded that wealthier patrons spend over \$1,100 annually on their sporting goods, apparel, and accessories (W, J, 2013).

Having thus far discussed apparel and equipment, and the impact that sports celebrities have on how appealing these products become to the audience they target, this essay is now going to explore the world of sporting goods equipment and shed some light on how much it can cost the average American just to own the proper equipment to play his or her favorite sports. Before investigating the more costly sports such as golf or tennis, one should discuss some of the more basic sports that might be a little less inexpensive for one to take part in. Soccer is the most popular sport in the world and is played in more countries than any other sport being played today. Why is this? Not only has soccer has enticed millions of athletes with the charm of the game, it has attracted fans due to it being the most financially inexpensive sport to take part in. Unlike other sports where multiple pieces of equipment must be purchased in order to play, all one needs to play soccer would be a soccer ball and a few other participants.

Soccer can be played even without an official ball, as long as one has a ball of some sort that will roll. Soccer is hands down the most popular sport in third world countries and brings a sense of pride and unity to these countries. As one can see, soccer is a very inexpensive sport to play, but this is not the case for the rest of the sporting world. Other organized team sports such as baseball, basketball, and football, all require hundreds if not thousands of dollars for a team to fully take part in. This might not seem like good news coming from the standpoint of an athlete, but from an economic perspective it means business for the many stores across the world that sell sporting goods and equipment.

Take the sport of baseball, for instance. Baseball can require various pieces of expensive equipment if one wishes to play the sport up to its highest of standards. Aluminum or wooden

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bats, balls, gloves, specialized cleats, helmets, and even specialized apparel are just some of the typical items that a baseball enthusiast might purchase, and each can come with a hefty price tag. For example, one could go into Dicks Sporting Goods store in search of some of these items and expect to pay anywhere from \$400 to over \$1,000 for all of this merchandise. The average baseball bat can range in prices of anywhere from \$40 to over \$250. Cleats are no different and usually ring up at an average of \$50 to \$150 or more. Add a \$45 to \$75\$ glove and a pair of baseball socks that cost over \$20 a pack and you've quickly spent close to a grand, give or take a few dollars. For a baseball player who might play from a young age through high school, the sport then turns into a multi-thousand-dollar investment (Tanier, 2012).

According to Bloomberg, over 4 million children ages 6-12 play baseball every year, which would seem like an impressive figure if it this number wasn't a one million child decline from years past (Mahler, 2013). Yet, there is still an untold fortune to be made for the companies that sell this equipment every year to these adolescent athletes. Another thing factoring into this money-making equation is that children who begin to play sports, such as baseball, at a young age will continue to grow and will eventually outgrow the clothes, shoes, helmets and even bats that they had purchased as recently as a year earlier, putting them in need of new equipment annually as prices grow for adult sized gear. According to the Sporting Goods Manufacturing Association, baseball and softball equipment sales accounted for an estimated \$488 million, and with the additional costs of cleats and uniforms that teams require, the total sales then breaks 1 billion dollars (Tanier, 2012).

Moving on from baseball, this essay will explore the world of basketball and discover how expensive this sport can be as well for the average player. Just like in baseball, basketball requires its players to purchase multiple pieces of equipment as well as other various accessories

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if one is to play the game with the finest quality products. Basketball players usually have an equipment shopping list that includes basketballs, which can range from \$7 to \$70 in price for a single ball. Basketball shoes can cost up to \$250 a pair. Apparel such as shorts and shirts can cost anywhere from \$10 to \$50 a piece, and there are other miscellaneous items that can be purchased, such as special socks, headbands, shooting sleeves, etc. Just by purchasing a basketball, a pair of shoes, and the appropriate clothing apparel, a young player could spend over \$400 (Stamper, 2013). This cost is only a fraction of the most expensive item required to play the sport of basketball, which is a basketball goal for home use. Not every player will buy his or her own goal, but for those that do, basketball goals usually cost anywhere from \$100 to \$3,000 depending on the brand and the kind of goal that is being purchased. The ones on the cheaper end of the pricing spectrum usually come with a small backboard made of thick plastic along with a rim and net. This model can be hung onto a freestanding object such as a pole that constitutes garage siding. The goals that can cost thousands of dollars are the ones that are made to simulate NBA standards. These goals come with a 60+ inch backboard made of premium shatter proof glass. They also are attached to their own pole and lever system that can raise and lower the goal to any specific height, and in order to be installed they are required to be anchored down into multiple feet of concrete. Buying a goal can cost a lot of money and is not the right option for everyone wanting to get involved in the sport, yet millions of goals are bought every year.

2016 BLACK FRIDAY SALE
The Biggest Sale of the Year
Starts @ Midnight November 20th

Model	Special Offer	Original Price	Sale Price
Goalrilla GS60c	Add Standard Pole Pad for only \$99	Was \$1,499.99	\$799.95
Goalrilla GS111	Free Standard Pole Pad	Was \$1,499.99	\$799.99
Goalrilla CV54	Free Universal Pole Pad Free Universal Backboard Pad	Was \$1,699.99	\$999.99
Goalrilla CV60	Free Universal Pole Pad Free Universal Backboard Pad	Was \$1,999.99	\$1,199.99
Goalrilla CV72	Free Universal Pole Pad Free Universal Backboard Pad	Was \$2,299.99	\$1,499.99
Goalrilla DC72E1	Free E1 Pole Pad Free NCAA Backboard Pad	Was \$2,899.99	\$1,999.99

FREE Yard Guard \$249 Value (Available on CV54, CV60, CV72, and DC72E1)

The Biggest Sale of the Year. STARTS NOVEMBER 20TH Goalrilla Goals Up To 47% Off!

(Advertisement displaying actual products and prices from the “Goalrilla” basketball equipment company)

Much like baseball, the average parent will shell out between \$500 and \$1,000 annually to fully supply his or her child with the best equipment that money can buy, along with uniforms and shoes to match. So far, all of the costs that have discussed have primarily focused on the players and the equipment and apparel that they may buy, which means that these average figures are not taking into account all of the money that is spent annually on league participation fees, travel, hotel stays, food, etc. Millions more are spent on these expenditures every year. For example, one popular sports league for adolescent athletes is the AAU. AAU is an American adolescents sports league that mainly deals with the sport of basketball, and can cost parents anywhere from \$400 to \$4,000 a year depending on the level of participation that they are involved in. There are different amateur leagues like this in every major team sport such as soccer, baseball, and football that all can cost similar fees to what the AAU league charges.

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To round out the sporting world, other sports such as golf and tennis can be just as expensive, if not even more so. Golf clubs do not come cheap by any means. In fact, some sets of clubs can cost over \$2,000. Tennis also brings in a good amount of consumer revenue by selling rackets for \$250 and up. Then there of course is the apparel, accessories, tournament fees, and other fees that make these sports multi thousand dollar ventures as well, even if they aren't team based or as popular in America as baseball or basketball. The economic impact from team sports is quite staggering. Billions of American dollars are spent every year by the parents and athletes that participate in these events, and all of this money is generated back into the country's economy, providing a source of economic growth for the United States.

In addition to sports apparel, further income is generated through sports spectatorship. Whether it be home media, ticket sales, or TV packages, sports fans spend billions of dollars annually to see their favorite teams in action. In fact, being able to see a favorite sports team has become so popular and in demand for American fans that entire television networks, radio stations, websites, apps, and streaming services are all dedicated solely to sports fans' needs. One example of this would be ESPN. ESPN is a television network that broadcasts a variety of live sporting events, sports talk shows, sports news, and anything else that one could think of being sports related on a system of channels such as ESPN, ESPN2, ESPNU, and ESPNNEWS.

This sports media giant was originally founded in 1979. In this era of television, there was no such thing as a channel dedicated entirely to sports, much less a network that would be on for all 24 hours in a day. ESPN broke the mold and started small with a single show, the first ever "Sportscenter," being broadcast at 7:00 pm on Friday, September 7th, 1979 (Vogan, 2013). Now, nearly 40 years later, ESPN proclaims themselves to be the "worldwide leader in sports."

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According to Forbes, in 2014 ESPN was worth 51 million dollars (Badenhausen, 2014). Being worth over 50 million dollars means that ESPN is easily one of the most valuable publicly traded companies in the American economy. In 2014, ESPN was said to be worth more than other monetary giants on the market such as Lowes, Sprint, and even Twitter. According to Forbes, ESPN generates a massive income of over 4.5 billion dollars annually due to the millions of subscribers the company brings in, various television deals with major sporting leagues such as the NFL, NBA, and MLB, and advertising outlets (Badenhausen, 2014). In comparison to the vast wealth that ESPN is accumulating, CBS, the highest rated broadcasting network in the US, made 1.6 billion in 2014 (Badenhausen, 2014). One example of a massive TV deal that ESPN has signed would be a deal it struck with the NFL in 2015. In 2015, ESPN earned the right to broadcast playoff football for the NFL for the first time in the company's 35-year broadcasting history. This deal was a 15.2-billion-dollar blockbuster that slowly provided ESPN with even more viewers, and the company crawls ever closer to owning every sporting event to come across a television screen (Badenhausen, 2014).

It might seem as if ESPN already has a monopoly on the sports media market, but they are always expanding and still looking to capture even more annual viewers. ESPN does not yet own the rights to broadcast a Super Bowl game, and as far as viewership and advertising goes, the Super Bowl is a virtual gold mine. According to Forbes, the 2016 Super Bowl grossed an estimated 620 million dollars (Badenhausen, 2016). This figure stands as the record for the most expensive and profitable one-day sporting event of all time. The previous record holder for this feat was the Manny Pacquiao and Floyd Mayweather boxing match that brought in 200 million dollars in a single day.

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The profits of the 2016 Super Bowl can be broken down into a few different categories of spending that come into play every year for the event. The first source of income for every Super Bowl is the ticket sales. The face value of an average ticket could range anywhere from \$800 to \$3,000, depending on what part of the stadium the ticket allows its holder to sit. (Badenhausen, 2016). If these prices didn't already seem staggering, the tickets that sold on the secondary market for this year's NFL championship were at all-time highs. The average ticket that was sold on the secondary market was anywhere between \$4,500 and \$6,000 (Badenhausen, 2016). Take the prices of these tickets and multiply the average cost by the number of people who attended—over 71,000 people—and the ticket sales amount to millions of dollars. Of the 71,000 plus people who attended the event, it is estimated that the average fan spent over \$150 on other expenses such as food, merchandise, and other arena services during the duration of the game. According to CBS Sports, an estimated 10.83 million dollars was spent by fans who attended the 2016 Super Bowl in the arena alone.

The next major source of profit that helped make up the \$620 million was from gambling (Badenhausen, 2016). Gambling is a huge source cash flow for all major sporting events, and the Super Bowl especially. Over the past 25 years, the book keepers in Las Vegas have only lost money twice on the Super Bowl. In 2015, Vegas cashed in over 3.2 million for the New England Patriots last minute win over the Seattle Seahawks. In 2016 for Super Bowl 50, a record number of bets were placed in Las Vegas for the big game, yet Vegas did not come out on top, meaning that some of the “big player” gamblers in Vegas went home with a hefty payday rather than the house. Even though the betting side of the Super Bowl might not bring in nearly as much as ticket sales or TV deals, it is still a multi-million-dollar industry that generates profits for many businesses in Las Vegas and other cities that participate in the sports gambling process.

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Regarding TV deals, the Super Bowl makes a large majority of its money from television broadcasting deals and advertising fees that large companies pay in order to land prime real estate by buying up commercial time during the big game. It also makes a sizeable profit from the TV time that the annual halftime show provides. For a single thirty second commercial, one would have to pay a sum of 5 million dollars, which is almost a half a million more than the going rate for ads the previous year. It was estimated that CBS, the TV network that hosts the Super Bowl every year, made over 350 million in ad revenue from the many big-name companies that paid for a commercial spot during the championship. Some of popular companies that advertise annually during the Super Bowl include Coca-Cola, Pepsi, and Chrysler. Some of the companies that made their big screen debut for advertising during the Super Bowl included Buick, Pokemon, and even Colgate toothpaste (Badenhausen, 2016).

Another major revenue source in regards to the Super Bowl is the actual teams and players. Peyton Manning collecting his second Super Bowl ring in the 2016 game was the headline after the dust had settled. For this victory, Peyton received a bonus of 2 million dollars for being on the winning team of the AFC, and was said to have received a similar bonus if not more for the Super Bowl win. The players who are on the winning team receive an extra \$102,000 and the losing team members received \$51,000 just for participating in the game (Badenhausen, 2016). The aforementioned sources that bring in money for the Super Bowl are usual contributors every year, and the incredible 620 million that is brought in from the Super Bowl is not the only major source of money generated from championship sports.

The MLB's World Series, The NBA's Playoff Finals, and the NCAA's March Madness tournament all create millions of dollars in revenue on their own and billions when combined. Another benefactor that has not yet been discussed from these major sporting championship

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events are the cities in which these events take place. For example, when two cities send a team into a championship series or game, those cities then become a hotspot for financial gain over the course of the championship. Businesses, vendors, restaurants, and hotels alike can all bank on a busy week to accommodate the inflow of tourists and sports fans that come along with championship sporting events. Besides ESPN, the most dominant entertainment provider in sports would be CBS. Besides the Super Bowl, CBS also has the rights to broadcast the final rounds of The Masters golf tournament, which is a very profitable championship golf tournament of the PGA, and along with the Masters and Super Bowl, CBS covers action from the NCAA's March Madness basketball tournament including having the exclusive rights to the final two rounds of the tournament leading to the championship.

Thus far, this essay has elucidated on just how much money is spent on sports each year from consumers, whether it be the average sports fan or a major broadcasting company. Apparel, tickets, television, equipment, leagues, lessons, and other expenditures are all part of Americans' annual sports wish lists, and it is these items that contribute over 60 billion dollars to our nations annual GDP (Heitner, 2015). This is all also not to mention just how much money that professional athletes and the organizations that they play for are worth solely based on sports alone. Some athletes get paid an upwards of 25 million dollars a year, and the organization that they play for could be well worth over a billion dollars alone. With all of these things being said, now is the time to transition into another major idea of this thesis, and that is how sports have left a social impact on our country and the many sports fans who bleed their team colors all season long.

Social Impacts

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To many people, sports are more than just a game, but rather a way of life. They are born into families that have raised them from a young age to be competitive, athletic, and to cheer for certain teams and love certain sports more than others. A perfect example of this can be found right here in the state of Kentucky, with the entire state rooting for the beloved Kentucky Wildcats year after year. The Kentucky Wildcats are the collective collegiate athletes who play for the University of Kentucky across all sports whether it be football, baseball, and of course (and especially) basketball. Those who live in this great state and root for these Wildcats are some of the most fanatic bunch of sports enthusiasts of any in the entire nation. In fact, the reputation of the fans devotion almost exceeds the legacy that the school's athletics has created for itself. Using phrases such as "Kentucky fans travel as well or better than any other fan base in the country" and "no matter where you are, blue gets in!" are just a few examples of how sports analysts and other coaches describe the behavior of Kentucky Wildcat fans.

Due to the way that Kentucky Wildcat basketball is perceived in this state, many young boys and girls have all grown up playing basketball from a young age, wishing for their chance to wear a Wildcat uniform. This behavior has not only had its effect on my generation, but children from the last five or six decades have been following their beloved blue-clad heroes. When those children became mothers and fathers, their kids simply took their place in living out this fantasy. What is really amazing is that the state of Kentucky is not the only place that lives in a society that places so much emphasis on sports. In Alabama, it is all about Crimson Tide football. In New England, the Boston Red Sox and New England Patriots have been the talk of many towns for nearly a century. Across the globe, in many countries, whether it's South America, Europe, or Africa, many people fall in love with the game of soccer and play it with incredible passion.

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People are revolving their lives around these sports instead of merely leaving the games on the court, field, or mound. Why is this?

One reason that many sports fans have let the games have such a huge impact on their lives is because sports can affect how people view the world and their own lives due to the social impact of sports. In their most basic forms, sports are nothing more than mere pass times that were invented by those looking for enjoyable activities decades and even centuries ago. Over the years, they have evolved to leave an imprint on those who have participated in them. Sports do not just simply teach someone rules to a game, but they also can aid individuals in learning valuable life skills and successful personality traits, such as a hard work ethic, competitiveness, discipline, determination, teamwork, and many more. They also bring unity to people who live in the same town or even across the world through a mutual love for the game or certain teams. Lastly, sports have captured our attention and have become millions of people's primary source of entertainment along with bringing them happiness and pride.

Sports have also always provided people with a chance at opportunity. There are many stories of athletes who have come from a poor or broken home in a bad part of the world that through their athletic abilities, they were able to make it out of negative circumstances and give themselves a chance to change their life forever. This scenario is also seen on the college sports scene every year, where thanks to a teenager's athletic talents, he or she is able to attend college at universities that the athlete would not have otherwise had the opportunity to attend. Some collegiate athletes are given the chance to play sports professionally, helping them to provide for their family for a lifetime. Many of the current players in the NBA today can thank basketball for giving them a chance to be successful.

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It is stories like this that makes sports inspiring and motivates so many young athletes to work hard and become the best player that they can be so that they too may one day be presented with an opportunity of sorts to make their own lives better. This is the primary social aspects of sports: it has changed the way we look at sports, allowing them to become more than just a game, evolving into an outlet and potential place of opportunity for those who can succeed at them. Poverty has always been a social issue, and sports has for sure left its mark on this issue as well as many others. Some of the most famous names in some of today's professional sports came from humble beginnings to become superstars, millionaires, and inspirations to the many fans who came to adore them over the course of their career.

Someone who is a prime example of this would be Allen Iverson. Iverson came from a poorer side of town in Hampton, Virginia. His mother had given birth to him when she was only fifteen years old, and his father had abandoned his parental responsibilities early on. Iverson has been quoted saying that growing up he can remember multiple times in his adolescent life where he would be living in a home without water, power, or phone service at times due to the financial hardships he and his mother faced. From an early age he can remember times being tough, but he could also remember that sports were always an outlet for him. Through the years, Iverson was able to use his athletic talents in both football and basketball to earn himself a scholarship to Georgetown University where he would then be drafted by the Philadelphia 76ers in the 1996 NBA draft, forever changing his life and turning him into a basketball star, worth millions of dollars (Babb, 2016).

Sports has always been able to give hope to those in poverty and has always been a source of happiness for the less fortunate. With that being said, will every good athlete make it to be a millionaire professional? The reality is that many athletes careers will end at the collegiate level,

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but these thousands of teens earn athletic scholarships every year and earn educations at schools they could not originally afford giving their lives a whole new meaning. Just because one doesn't turn out to be the next Allen Iverson doesn't mean that sports have not had a positive influence on him or her.

Sports have helped those effected by poverty in other ways as well, besides giving a person a chance to be a come-from-nothing super star. Many of the major sporting leagues such as the NBA, NFL, and MLB have all done their part in organizing charity events and projects that can help bring aid to those in financially impoverished circumstances. The NBA has created its own foundation whose sole purpose is to address different social issues and help the thousands of people who are annually affected by them. The organization is called "NBA Cares." Through the hard work of the NBA Cares organization, professional basketball players have been able to reach out to children, families, and even entire communities that have been effected by sickness, poverty, or even natural disasters. Players will visit towns and even homes to meet those who have been personally effected, and will even put on clinics at local schools giving children the once-in-a-lifetime chance to see their basketball heroes in person while teaching them the many great values gleaned from the game of basketball

The NBA Cares organization also partners with the Make A Wish Foundation to make many of these charity dream events come true for the people who are being benefited. Some examples of these charity events that NBA Cares has been a part of include Stephen Curry meeting one on one with 14 children who have serious illnesses, the entire Cleveland Cavaliers team visiting sick children at the local Cleveland Clinic hospital, or the New Orleans Pelicans helping to serve Thanksgiving dinner to the less fortunate in New Orleans (NBA Cares, 2016). Of course, the NBA is not the only major sports organization who lends a helping hand to those in need in their

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local communities. The NFL has its own charity called the “NFL Foundation” where they, much like the NBA, volunteer to make dreams come true and help brighten the lives of the thousands of people they aid annually. For example, every year the New England Patriots host a series of Christmas parties throughout the multiple Salvation Army centers in Massachusetts, where the entire Patriots roster and even the cheerleaders hand out food and gifts personally to children in need (NFL Foundation, 2016).

These are ways that the professional sports organizations personally deal with social issues such as poverty, hunger, and disease, but this just scratches the surface on how sports have impacted social issues. Perhaps the most controversial social issue that not only professional sports, but sports in general has had an influence on would be the issue of race. Race and ethnicity have played a huge part in sports social issues dating back many decades. For many years, some sports were labeled as “Whites only” games, and those of different ethnicities were not allowed to join in at all. Not only were other races of athletes not allowed to play in many of the mainstream sports, but they were also seen as “inferior” competitors as well.

One of the best examples of race, sports, and social issues all colliding at once would be the 1936 Olympic games. At these games, Adolph Hitler had already boasted that Germany had great chances of winning, due to the fact that German athletes were physically superior due to their race. In fact, Hitler had even mocked and criticized the American teams for allowing African Americans to participate in the games. This would all come to be proven as nothing more than narrow minded bluffing, as African American Olympian Jesse Owens would dominate the 1936 games and would even defeat the German athletes in multiple events causing Adolph Hitler to storm out of the stadium in a fit of rage and embarrassment (Jesse Owens Trust Co, 2017). Even though Owens had succeeded at the Olympic games and had broken racial barriers

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with his winning performances, he was not greeted with the warm welcome that Olympic athletes of today receive when they return home with gold. According to Owens, racism that was still very much alive here in the United States turned him into just another face in the crowd who still dealt with the same problems that every African American had to deal with in the 1930's.



(image of Jesse Owens saluting after winning the 1936 Olympic Games and a German athlete giving the Nazi party salute)

Owens was quoted about the life he lived after shortly returning home from Berlin in 1936 having said, "I had to go to the back door. I couldn't live where I wanted. I wasn't invited to shake hands with Hitler, but I wasn't invited to the White House to shake hands with the president, either." Even though Owens was seen as an American victor in the aspect of sports, he was seen and treated as another member of an unequal minority group in his own country. Jesse Owens would not be recognized full for his amazing 1936 Olympic games performance until

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some forty years later in the year 1976 when he was presented the with the United States Medal of Freedom by President Gerald Ford at the Montreal Olympic games (Jesse Owens Trust Co, 2017). The case of Jesse Owens was one of many as time progressed. As sports became more and more commercialized and rose in popularity, the issue of race and player equality also came to the forefront. In all of the major sports, black athletes began to make their marks.

In 1946, the NFL reintegrated the league after banning all black players for the previous 13 seasons and almost immediately African American players began to lead their teams in different statistical categories (Fuhrman, 2008). It was not until the year 1953 that the NFL saw the emergence of its first black quarter back in Willie Thrower (Fuhrman, 2008). Even though the quarterback barrier was broken decades ago, even today the majority of the NFL teams are led at the quarterback position by white players. Moving on to the MLB, one cannot forget the rise of Jackie Robinson who became the first African American to play baseball professionally. In the year 1947, Robinson broke racial barriers in the MLB by signing a contract to play with the Brooklyn Dodgers. From there Robinson would go on to have great success and impact the game from the time he stepped into the batter's box. He was awarded the league's first ever "Rookie of the Year" award, recorded a .297 batting average, and also posted a league leading 29 stolen bases (Fuhrman, 2008).

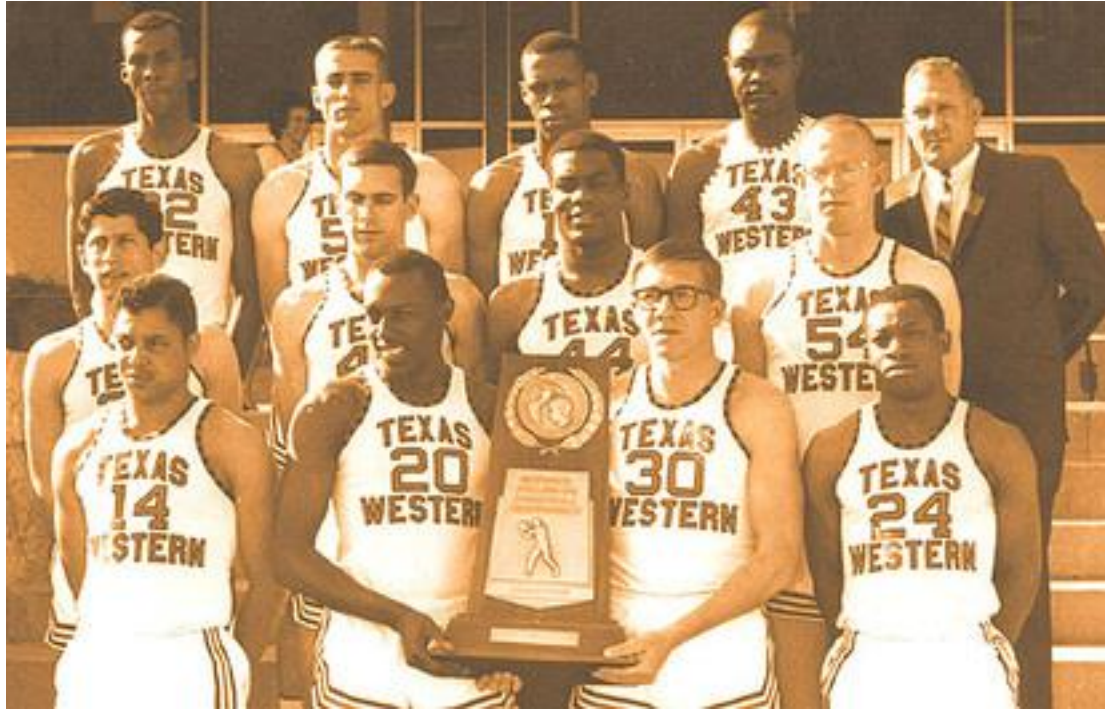
In light of all of Robinson's on field success, he too would fall victim to the reality of a country still battling amongst itself on the issue of race. Robinson had to deal with hate mail, racial slurs, on field conflicts with white players, and even death threats (Fuhrman, 2008). Also during his tenure in the MLB, Robinson would have to endure the impacts of racism in other ways as well. For example, when traveling to other cities to play other MLB teams, Robinson was not allowed equal service on the road when it came to eating and sleeping quarters, as well as the methods in

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which he had to travel with the team (Fuhrman, 2008). In spite of all of these struggles, Robinson was able to help lead the Dodgers to the 1956 World Series title, and is now an MLB Hall of Fame inductee. Robinson will forever be remembered as a pioneer for African American athletes who helped paved the way for names such as Hank Aaron and Willie Mays, two African American baseball stars who have Jackie to thank for their opportunities to play professionally on an equal playing field.

From the MLB, the discussion will now move to basketball. Not only was the NBA a place where racial barriers were made and later broken, but the NCAA Men's Basketball scene was also a hotbed for race issues as well. One story that comes to mind that can perfectly sum up the scene of discrimination in the NCAA Men's Basketball is the story of the 1965-1966 Texas Western Men's basketball squad. During a time when civil rights, race, and equality were being fought in court rooms and city streets, they were also being fought on the college hardwood. Texas Western was the first school in NCAA history to not just play African American players, but have an entire starting five composed of all black athletes. This team, much like the African American athletes before them would have to endure sources of hatred, bigotry, and unfairness as they played. Many of the fans at away games would call the Texas Western players by racial slurs and would deny them service in restaurants and hotels. The head coach, Don Haskins, would receive hate mail and threats on a weekly basis for playing five black players (Forgrave, 2016).

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(West Texas Miners Championship team that would start five African American players)

Though the West Texas Miners would face all of these negative experiences off of the court, it did not hold them back from changing the game of basketball forever. Throughout the season, The Miners would find a great deal of success. The team would post an impressive 28-1 record, and would even go on to win the NCAA National Title against the all-white college basketball powerhouse of the University of Kentucky (Forgrave, 2016). The 1965-1966 West Texas Miners team had proven once and for all that a team could not only play African American players and run a team on a normal standard, but it could also start African Americans and find as much success as any other team in the nation. This monumental season, along with newly recognized civil rights acts being passed to protect black athletes in the NCAA, would pave the way for more and more schools across the country to recruit, play, and promote African American athletes.

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By the 1971-1972 season, every school in the SEC, which was long known to be the most segregated college athletics conference in the country, had at least one African American student athlete on their rosters (Lapchick, 2008). From here, the NCAA Men's Basketball league, as well as other collegiate sports leagues, have evolved into the equal playing field for student athletes that it is today. The NCAA was not the only place where discrimination could be found on the hardwood, for the NBA and ABA faced their own racial issues as well. Though the NBA had been formed and active for four complete seasons, it did not sign and debut its first black player until the year 1950. That would be the year that Earl Lloyd would play his first game for the league and would begin a trend of equality on the professional basketball circuit. While this was an amazing feat for the game of basketball, many say that it pales in comparison to the achievement of Robinson in the MLB, it does not mean that Lloyd's time in the NBA was any less significant (Martinez, 2015).

Moving on from Basketball, the sports world would experience many racial barriers that would be created and then later broken. Athletes would begin to use their time in the media due to their athletic fame to voice their individual opinions about the current race issues that were developing in the country at the time. A perfect example of athletes using their unique positions in order to become race rights advocates would be the 1968 Olympic Games. At the 1968 Olympic games, athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos stood on the awards podium and created one of the most iconic images in sports history by giving the "black power" salute as the medal ceremony took place (Dimond, 2008). Tommie Smith was quoted as saying, "All we ask for, is an equal chance to be a human being."

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(Smith and Carlos at the 1968 Olympics)

Many say that the peaceful protest was due to the obvious unfair treatment that black athletes were receiving not only in the Olympic games, but back home in the United States across nearly every major sports organization. It reflected the social battlefield that the United States Civil Rights movement had become. This show of black pride came on the heels of the assassination of Civil Rights leader and activist Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis the same year. At this point in time, the African American athletes and even citizens in America were living a very different life of prejudice, discrimination, and injustice, and Carlos and Smith used their unique opportunity to show just how impactful the platform of sports could be on social issues. Fast forward over fifty years later to the modern sports world, and popular athletes are still creating ways for their protests to be seen and or heard. For example, police brutality and unfair treatment by authority figures to those in the African American community has become a hot button social issue today. In support of holding police officers accountable who have used unnecessary force against African Americans, LeBron James along with other members of the Cleveland Cavaliers wore shirts that donned the quote “I can’t breathe.”

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These three words were the last spoken by Eric Gardner as he died in July from a confrontation with a New York City police officer (Strauss, 2014). Other players from the opposing Brooklyn Nets team also wore the shirts to show their advocacy for the issue of police brutality. The issue of police brutality in America towards the African American community would also be protested by other famous athletes. When the infamous Michael Brown case occurred in Ferguson Missouri, where allegedly a young black man (Brown) was holding his arms up in the air as a sign of surrendering to the police when officer Darren Wilson shot him nine times, killing Brown on the scene. As a show of protesting this occurrence of police brutality, the St. Louis Rams ran out of their tunnel for a November game holding their hands in the air portraying the “hands up, don’t shoot” gesture that many protestors had been using for months outside Ferguson (Fantz, 2014). Many of the Rams football team members were quoted saying that they would soon be making trips to join the protests in Ferguson, and also to pay their respects for Michael Brown.

Continuing on to another case of civil protest in the NFL, the San Francisco 49’ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick was the center of mass media attention when he began to kneel and even sit during the playing of the national anthem before games during the 2016-2017 NFL season. Kaepernick was said to have dismissed himself from participating in the national anthem because he was wanting to make a statement that the African Americans of the country were still under great oppression from police officers as well as from other groups of people. When asked about why he was putting his reputation and NFL career at risk for the sake of these protests he was quoted by saying "This is not something that I am going to run by anybody. I am not looking for approval. I have to stand up for people that are oppressed. ... If they take football away, my endorsements from me, I know that I stood up for what is right” (Wyche, 2016). Kaepernick came under fire from the NFL, the media, and football fans across the country, but he would

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continue to peacefully protest for multiple games until the end of the season. From the actions of Kaepernick, other players in the NFL would begin to also kneel or sit during the playing of the national anthem in protest of how African Americans have been treated.



(Above is an image of Kaepernick and a fellow team mate kneeling in protest of the national anthem.)

In closing on the discussion about the impacts that sports have had on the social issue of race, and how race has also been an unfortunately prevalent theme throughout sporting history, one athlete that comes to mind who made unexpected strides in race equality in the sports world was Tiger Woods. Woods entered the eyes of the media at the age of two on the “Mike Douglas Show” as a child prodigy golfer in the making. He would not play in his first professional tournament until the year 1992, and he would not even play as professional until 1996. During all of this time, even in his younger years, Woods would have to battle the issue of race in order to become the professional phenomenon that he is known as today. Even in the 1980’s and 90’s, some prestigious golf courses around the country would not let Woods play on their grounds due to the fact that he was African American (Kelsey, 2007).

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Even before Tiger was known for his golfing prowess, he was the target of racism. Woods was the target of bullying in Cypress, California at his local elementary school. Here is a quote that Woods released in regards to a specific event where some older children singled Tiger out to make him the target of a racist incident:

"I became aware of my racial identity on my first day of school, on my first day of kindergarten. A group of sixth grades tied me to a tree, spray painted the word 'nigger' on me, and threw rocks at me. That was my first day of school. And the teachers really didn't do much of anything. I used to live across the street from school and kind of down the way a little bit. The teachers said 'okay, just go home.' So I had to out run all these kids going home, which I was able to do. It was certainly an eye opening experience, you know, being five years old we were the only minority family in all of Cypress, California."

Woods would grow from a young child who had to face bullying and racist taunts to become an incredible prodigy in the game of golf, and he eventually wound up playing for Stanford University, where he dominated the competition. Acts of racism would still follow Woods, no matter how well he played. During his college years, he would have to deal with racist hate mail, protestors greeting him at country club gates, and not receiving the credit for his accomplishments that he deserved, all due to the fact that he was an African American (Kelsey, 2007). Woods explained that this racist behavior was not the product of some regional stereotype, but rather that it was present wherever he traveled to compete. "People get this stereotype that racism is in the South. That's B.S. It's everywhere." Woods of course would go on to become arguably the most dominant golfer of all time, and one of the most successful athletes ever, no matter the color of his skin.

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This just goes to show that no matter the year, nor the sport, racism and ethnic equality has always been a hot button issue in the sports world, and the athletes that have been faced with this problem have used the games they play as an outlet to express their feelings about the issue. From Jesse Owens to Colin Kaepernick, African American athletes have been the target of criticism and praise for not only their athletic performances, but for the stances that they have taken on the social issue of race as well. Race has been an issue that sports have shed light on for nearly a century now, but this is not the only social issue that has been a point of discussion in the sports world. Issues such as gender equality, the nation's obesity epidemic, poverty, and even sexual orientation have all been topics that athletes and sports teams have all touched on.

Gender equality has been a topic of increasing controversy over the last half century. From the pay inequality, to the significantly less amount of exposure, women athletes have not gained the amount of enthusiasm or respect that their male counterparts have experienced for decades. For example, the average salary of a WNBA player is only estimated to be about \$72,000 before bonuses and benefits. In comparison to the NBA, they make around 70 times less, as the average NBA player is estimated to bring home around 5 million dollars before bonuses, benefits, and endorsements (Wallace, 2016). This monetary disparagement is not only present in the professional ranks, but also in the high school and collegiate levels as well. To illustrate this, Title IX was introduced over forty years ago, and its main purpose was to make sure that any school receiving funds could not allocate those funds to certain school programs based on sex, yet schools that receive these grants have been reported to spend over 190 million dollars more on male athletes than female athletes in scholarships alone (Wallace, 2016).

Besides the unequal pay, there has also been evidence that there is also unequal interest in men's and women's sports. A recent poll revealed that both women and men alike say that men are

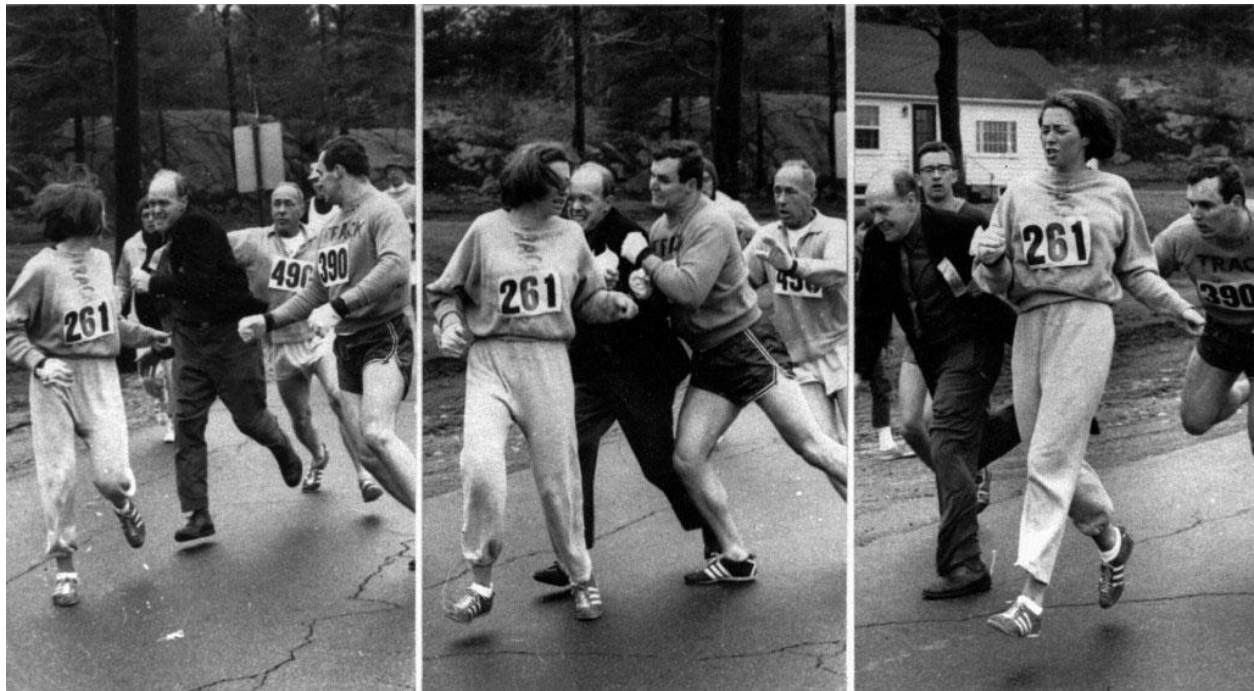
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better at sports and therefore more entertaining to watch (Wallace, 2016). Since this has become the majority school of thought in the sports world, funding for women's sports to gain better coverage likely will not increase until audiences of viewers genuinely believe that women are just as entertaining to watch as men when it comes to athletic competition. Though there are inequalities between the two worlds of men's and women's sports, there have been historical instances where women have broken the barriers of being barred from competing against men in certain competitions. One of the most famous of these occurrences was the 1976 Boston Marathon. During the historic race in 1967, female runner Katherine Switzer officially became the first woman to successfully run in and complete the heralded marathon (Switzer, 2017).

Switzer would make history in her run, but she would overcome a great deal of controversy in order to complete the race. In Switzer's autobiographical novel that recalls the event, she had an explosive argument with her then running coach, Arnie Briggs, weeks before the race. Briggs had scoffed at her for the idea of running in the marathon and told her that "no woman can run the Boston Marathon" (Switzer, 2017). In fact, Switzer even recalled that her boyfriend at the time had agreed to run the marathon with her, but claimed that he did not need to train for the race because, "if a girl can run a marathon, then I can run a marathon." So even before the race had Switzer was facing opposition from those who were close to her. According to Switzer, she had little trouble getting into the race and even heard comments from spectators that were supportive of her bravery. This behavior would soon change as in the middle of the race, a spectator had run onto the course and began to confront Switzer. The spectator grabbed Katherine and yelled "Get the hell out of my race, and give me those numbers" as he tried to rip off her runner's bib that displayed her runner's numbers (Switzer, 1967).

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Switzer claims that her coach, Arnie Briggs, had tried to apprehend the violent spectator who had lashed out at Katherine, but was unsuccessful. After struggling for a few more strides with the spectator, Switzer's boyfriend, "Big Tom," tackled the spectator, knocking him to the ground. After the spectator was subdued, Switzer remembers that she ran "like a kid running out of a haunted house" (Switzer, 2017). Below is a sequence of images that captured the event of Switzer being bombarded and then freed from her pursuer by her boyfriend. Switzer would overcome the event and would successfully finish the race and go down in history as a pioneer for women athletes trying to make it in a male-dominated sports world.



(The Boston Herald, 2017)

Katherine Switzer's character and bravery from 1967 still live on today, as this year in 2017 she ran again in the Boston Marathon and once again completed it successfully.

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Apart from the heroism of Katherine Switzer, many other famous female athletes competed against male counterparts and charted their course for unknown territories. The PGA Tour (Professional Golf Association) has hosted multiple women who have taken on the challenge of playing in men's tournaments. The first woman who felt like she should raise the bar for female golfers was Babe Zaharias. Babe was said to have been an excellent all-around athlete who found success in every sport that she attempted. Babe had even won two track and field golf medals in the 1932 Olympic games. She enjoyed a highly successful career in golf as she won 55 women's tournaments and was even credited as being a founder of the LPGA (Ladies Professional Golf Association) in 1949 (Rose, 2017).

In 1938, Zaharias would compete in her first men's professional golf tournament, the Los Angeles Open, making her the first woman to ever do so, and in 1945 she would play in the same event again and would even make the thirty-six-hole cut, finishing the tournament on the weekend (Rose, 2017). By playing in multiple men's tournaments and even giving her hand to help form the LPGA, Zaharias made it possible for other female professional golfers to experience the same successes. Other famous female golfers who have ventured into competing against men include Annika Sorenstam in 2003, Suzy Whaley also in 2003, and teenager Michelle Wie in 2004 (Rose, 2017).

In the rest of the professional sports world, women have all come to play in leagues of their own, but they are still breaking gender barriers and sending a message of athletic equality. In the year 2015, the NFL officially hired their first ever female official to be on the field refereeing games and calling plays alongside the usual male colleagues. Her name is Sarah Thomas, and she continues to be a full-time official with the NFL to this day (Feldman, 2016). Continuing on, there is Becky Hammon, who is an assistant coach for the San Antonio Spurs, a

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men's professional basketball team in the NBA. Hammon is the first full-time, salary paid female assistant coach in NBA history, and in 2014 finally broke ground into a league that has historically had very little involvement from women (Feldman, 2016). After Hammon, Nancy Lieberman became the second ever full-time NBA assistant coach as she was hired on to the Sacramento Kings coaching staff later in the 2014 season, following the hiring of Becky Hammon. This coaching endeavor was not the first time that Lieberman had worked professionally in men's basketball. In 2009, she was the head coach of the NBA Developmental league team, the Texas Legends (Feldman, 2016).

There are many different female athletes that have shown the world that women can be equals to men, and they have used the world of sports as their platform, once again showing just how important sports can be and how they are more than just a game, but rather an outlet for stories of bravery, success, and a determination to shine through. The next topic is an issue that has been a social mainstay in the news and on the minds of many Americans for years now, but it is just now finding its way into the sporting arena. The issue of equality for athletes who identify as being homosexual is beginning to emerge as more and more athletes are being more honest about their sexual lives. A few athletes that come to mind when setting the standard of how to be an openly homosexual athlete include Michael Sam, who was the first openly gay NFL draft pick made after revealing that he was gay in college (Hine, 2016). NBA center, Jason Collins, became the first openly gay NBA player in 2013. Robbie Rogers, who played midfield for the Los Angeles Galaxy, stated that he too was openly homosexual (Hine, 2016).

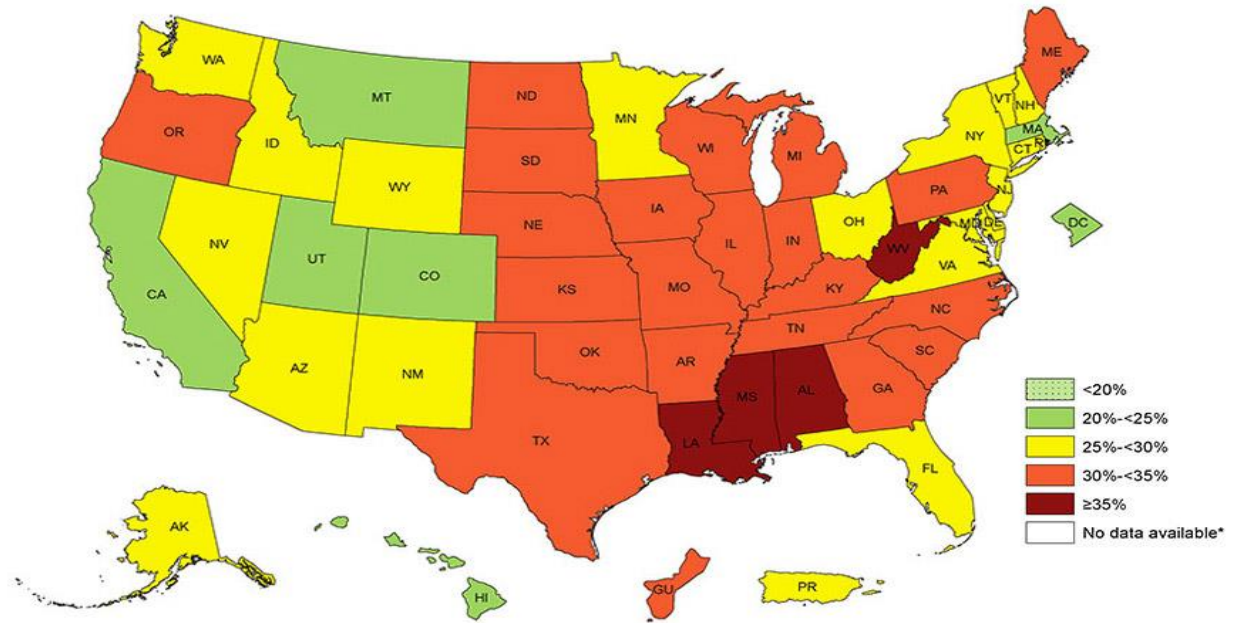
These athletes who have gained media attention for their sexual orientation have been all greeted with mixed emotions of both acceptance and criticism. The athletes themselves have been quoted saying that they had been treated differently from players, coaches, and even fans once they

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made their decisions to announce their true sexual identity. To some this new treatment left the athletes confused and puzzled. Robbie Rogers said, "I'm at the stage where it's kind of stupid. What's going on? I would never force anyone out, and everyone has their time, but come on, it's 2016. A lot has changed in the United States and around the world. Obviously, there are a lot of rights to fight for and a lot of hate here toward the LGBT community, but it's an opportunity to be a role model for millions and change the lives of kids not only in sports, but in our culture and around the world. It's a little disheartening" (Hine, 2016). While LGBT rights might not get all of the attention that it deserve in the sporting world, sports stars such as the ones previously mentioned are taking a stand and using their athletic abilities to give them a platform on which to use sports to fight for equality once again, not just for skin color or gender, but for sexual identity as well.

Moving on to the next item of discussion, the world of sports has been able to leave its mark on another social issue that has in recent years began to impact Americans of all ages. This social issue is not one of race, nor gender, but rather of health and wellbeing. This social issue does not focus heavily on the athletes themselves, but instead the fans who suffer from the increasing obesity epidemic in America. According to the Center for Disease Control, more than 1/3 (36.5) of adults in the United States are obese (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). An obese person is put at elevated risk for contracting other serious health conditions throughout the course of his or her life, which include diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and even certain types of cancer (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016).

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(Above is an actual map from the CDC showing the obesity epidemics spread across the country in adults)

The epidemic doesn't stop there. Unfortunately, childhood obesity is an issue of increasing concern in the United States as well. Once again according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, one in five children between the ages of 9-16 are stricken with obesity (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). This figure has been calculated after learning that these numbers have more than tripled since the mid 1970's. Children who suffer from obesity are at risk for the same potential health hazards and diseases as adults, but are also more likely to suffer socially as well. The Center for Disease Control says that obese children are at a higher risk to be bullied due to their appearance, and are also at a higher risk of develop poor social skills and experiencing social isolation (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). Obesity is effecting millions of adults and children across the country, and many different ways to improve the health of those who are obese have been proposed by different groups, including many sports organizations who have encouraged people to get out and get active to help combat the obesity plight. Over the years, sports have been a key combatant in fighting childhood obesity and has

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encouraged adulthood health also. Besides the fact that sports are obviously a good source of exercise due to the amount of physical activity they provide, they also make exercising easier for those who play them by giving the person a goal to work toward besides just counting distance traveled or calories burned (De Lench, 2012).

Sports are a fun way to get children active, but just as they are entertaining, they are effective in keeping children fit. According to research, children and adolescents who bike or walk short distances to and from school at least 3-4 times a week in addition to playing team sports have significantly lower chances of becoming overweight or suffering from weight related health problems, regardless of their athletic abilities (De Lench, 2012). According to the information recorded from a New Hampshire and Vermont telephone survey given to parents of high school children, students who participated in 3 or more sports/sports related activities were 27% more likely to be in shape and avoid dealing with weight related ailments. This number then grows to over 39% when the data was compared to that of children who participated in no physical activity at all. Finally, the survey also found that children who were walking or biking to school multiple days a week were 33% less likely to be overweight or obese in comparison to children who never walked or biked to school (De Lench, 2012).

Children can often find ways to become active in sports through their local school system, but unfortunately, some school systems have cut back in the funding of sports programs and other programs in relation to physical activity in order to provide more money to programs that can benefit students more academically (De Leanch, 2012). Since the obesity epidemic is a looming issue seen in such a large number of children, professional sports organizations and athletic companies have used their respective platforms to do what they can in aiding the fight against obesity in America. In 2010, former forward for the Boston Celtics, Paul Pierce, along with other

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famous professional athletes, gathered together to form an organization that would provide financial funding for physical education and programs that will provide outlets for physical activities in low income financial areas, where the obesity rates are even higher than the national averages (Sideman, 2012). Their organization is known as “nPlay” and has had members who were other famous athletes, such as Grant Hill, Evander Holyfield, and Jay Fielder. These athletes even visited the schools that they funded and gave them advice that would last a lifetime; being active from a young age and leading an active lifestyle will contribute to their health and help keep them fit for years to come. Evander Holyfield was quoted saying, “We hope to communicate our anti-obesity messages by getting kids to understand that their youth is their strength. Kids are only going to do what their parents are going to lead them to do. We need to teach kids that if they don’t quit [trying] that they’ll reach their goals.” The organization nPlay even partnered with the USDA MyPyramid initiative that gives an outline of a healthy diet that is recommended for adolescents, providing serving sizes, as well as the proper variety of meats, grains, and vegetables (Sideman, 2012).

nPlay isn’t the only organization that has been created by professional athletes with the health interest of the nation’s health in mind. The NBA has created their own outreach program that promotes physical activity and healthy diet. The program is known as “NBA Fit,” and it provides detailed diet and exercise plans that professional players use themselves in order to be as in shape as possible to compete in the NBA. NBA Fit’s mission statement is to help communities everywhere to “Be active, eat healthy, and Play together while promoting the values taught through the games of basketball” (NBA Fit, 2017). Through this program, the NBA players and coaches, along with partnered health sponsors, have created a series of health programs that are

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accessible online, and they have even developed an application for smart devices that allows users to access health information at a moment's notice.



(NBA superstar Kyrie Irving at an elementary school event where athletes get hands on in the fight against childhood obesity through the NBA Fit program.)

The NBA is not the only professional sports organization that has branched out into battling obesity and poor health. The NFL has also taken a stand to help spread awareness on the subject of obesity. Much like the NBA, the NFL has designed its own organization that dedicates itself to fitness and health. NFL UP! is the name of the special segment of the NFL, and like NBA Fit, it is an online site that offers an abundance of information in regards to the workout regiments and dietary plans that NFL players themselves follow in order to stay in shape and even lose weight (NFL Up, 2017). These professional sports organizations and coalitions have invested both time and money into fighting the obesity epidemic in America and have proven that sports can be more than just an enjoyable pastime; they can also be a staple in a healthy lifestyle that promotes being physically active. Sports have touched many other social issues in

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the wake of their popularity over the years, and they will continue to do so as more and more gifted individuals compete and use sports as an outlet to spread awareness of the issues that they are passionate about. Moving on from the social aspects in which the sports world has greatly impacted, the topic of discussion will now move to the emotional impacts that sports can have on its fans and players, and how sports can even provide a sense of unity and nationalism to those participating.

Emotional and Mental Health Aspects

Since their inception, sports have inspired those who have participated in them to feel emotions that are byproducts of the games themselves. These emotions can be both positive or negative depending on the situation, but one thing is for certain, and that is that there is definitely an emotional aspect of being a competitor in these activities. According to *Psychology Today*, Sports have been known to evoke a wide range of emotions from fans and athletes that include “inspiration, pride, exhilaration, as well as fear, frustration, anger, and even panic” (Taylor, 2011). According to the author, emotions have been recognized as one of the most important aspects of how an athlete will perform due to how much of one’s mind is involved in rational decision making when competing (Taylor, 2011). Those who compete in sports are drastically effected by the emotions that can arise while playing, and these emotions can affect athletes’ confidence and determination, leading them to victory or causing them to falter and give into fear and other negative feelings, letting the outcome of their play become detrimentally effected.

Now that it is known that emotions certainly are present in the realm of sports and that those who play these games are effected by them, it is time to discuss the matter of how athletes have been benefitting emotionally from sports for many years. Just as it has been proven that participating in sports has various physical health benefits, it has also been proven that it can help one’s

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mental and emotional well-being. One of the greatest emotional and mental benefits that athletes can experience from participating in sports is the benefit of reducing stress in a healthy manner. Physical exercise has been known to be a healthy source of stress relief for years, but add the traditional stress relief that physical activity has to offer and combine it with the entertainment and other healthy emotions that sports can provide, and one can find an excellent source of blowing of steam. Physical activity releases endorphins in the nervous system that causes relaxation and reduces stress naturally. After these natural stress relieving benefits, one's mind is focused on the sport itself, and he or she has created his or her own form of escape from stress and temporarily has forgotten daily worries and anxieties (Ketchum, 2012). In addition to this boosted form of stress relief, sports participation has also been shown to increase a person's self-confidence and motivational drive as he or she learns to achieve goals and overcome obstacles within the games themselves (Ketchum, 2012). When playing in a team sport, one can experience a newfound sense of belonging and acceptance among team mates and can also learn how to improve teamwork skills as well (Ketchum, 2012).

Sports not only effects the emotions of those who participate in them, but they can also have an emotional impact on the fans of sports teams as well. For many fans, following their favorite sports team is almost like a religious activity. They experience emotional highs and lows from their team's performance, even though they are not the ones playing the game themselves.

According to a psychological study, sports fans tend to rank higher in emotional health and stability when they are heavily involved in following a local sports team (Hill, 2012). According to research done by a leading sports psychologist, Daniel Wann, sports fans tend to be more connected with others around them in the areas in which they live thanks to sports and share an emotional bond with other fans. Wann was quoted saying, "You have a built-in connection to

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others in your environment. If you live in San Francisco and you are a Giants fan, it's pretty easy to be connected to others." This presents a great example of how being a sports fan can benefit one emotionally by staying more connected with the city in which he or she lives (Hill, 2012).

Wann was also quoted saying that, "Sports fans are quite active physically, politically, and socially." All of these positive behaviors come from the healthy emotional feelings that sports fans experience from following a sports team. Those who passionately follow a sports team, whether it be a local team or not, are often noted to be less likely to exhibit aggressive behaviors, especially in comparison to those who do not follow sports at all (Hill, 2012). The mental and emotional benefits of being a sports fan only seem to grow, as a professor in psychology Sian Beilock from the University of Chicago found that those who avidly follow a sports team seem to also have improved speech function as well as a heightened activity in the region of their brain that deals with planning, controlling, or decision making (Hill, 2012). "What I think our research suggests is a strong connection between the mind and the body," Beilock says. "When we are sitting on the couch watching a football game or a hockey game, our brain is actually playing the game itself in a way."

Another emotional benefit that has been reaped from being an avid sports fan is not only the level of connectedness that others have with other sports fans in their town or state, but that they can share the activity of following a sports team with their children and other family members, providing families with another healthy activity to bond over and share together. Other emotional and mental health benefits that have been found from the minds of sports fans is the release of stimulants and neurons that occurs when your favorite team wins, giving the fan a rush of dopamine (Borrelli, 2016). Studies have also shown that those who watch sports teams on a regular basis have been known to produce higher levels of testosterone, primarily due to the fact

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that the same region of our brains that generates the response for the chemical to be formulated is often activated when being exhilarated by a close finish or a big victory (Borrelli, 2016). The positives from this have been found to be short bursts in strength and hormones that cause muscle growth and energy.

After discussing the many emotional benefits that one can accrue from being a sports fan, one must also take into account the negative side of this report. While being a sports fan does boost the emotional health of its viewers, it can also pose some health risks as well from a mental health standpoint. For example, it has been often reported that sports fans have been known to experience elevated levels of stress in their lives due to the emotional roller coaster that sports spectating can become for dedicated followers (Borrelli, 2016). According to research that has been conducted on the subject, sports fans often have heightened levels of adrenaline and cortisol in their bodies, which are chemicals that are reactants to high stress levels. In some cases, when a game comes down to the wire and a big victory is at stake, fans can even experience dangerous levels of stress induced bodily reactions, such as elevated heart rates, high blood pressure, anxiety attacks, and even heart attacks in the most severe cases (Borrelli, 2016). According to Doctor Robert Kloner, who is a director of cardiovascular research in Huntington Medical Research in Pasadena, California, “When there is an intense game or intense play some fans have a very emotional response — a fight-or-flight response with an increase in the sympathetic nervous system output and an increase in adrenaline levels.” In the most intense situations when fans experience life threatening events such as heart attacks from the emotional stress they experience, it is said that blood flow can be increased to one’s heart by over three hundred times the normal healthy rate, and preexisting conditions such as hypertension or irregular heartbeats

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can help trigger dangerous cardiac events when paired with emotional traumas of an overwhelming sports game (Borrelli, 2016).

On a lighter note, those who watch sports on a regular basis can also experience a boost in cardiovascular health. According to a case study performed in 2013, those who watch sports on a regular basis can achieve the same heart health benefits of those who work out a few times a week (Borrelli, 2016). This is due to the fact that those recorded in the study showed increased heart rate levels in a healthy range when watching an average sporting event, which mirrored heart activity that has been recorded from light aerobic exercise (Borrelli, 2016). There is a clear correlation between being a sports fan and receiving mental, emotional, and even physical health benefits. Whether it be a boost in self-esteem, a strong sense of belonging, or improved brain activity, being an avid sports fan gives on an array of perks that those who do not follow sports might not receive. To close out the topic of how sports can affect fans emotions and mental perception, the discussion now moves to the idea of how Social Media can help create an emotional surge and spike in popularity among sports fans over certain teams during their times of success.

Sports and Social Media

With the use of social media, sports have more venues to reach more people in terms of advertising, financial gain, and even popularity and accessibility. Social Media is perhaps the most expansive platform that sports teams and organizations can utilize in today's internet age. According to recent studies, over one fifth of American internet users are expected to all be active on the social media outlet known as Twitter (Dimoro, 2015). With such a huge audience on the internet, sports teams and even individual athletes have become active on different social sites such as Twitter, Facebook and Snapchat, and they have used these sites to promote their

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own teams and even announce news that breaks within the franchise, due to the idea that so many more people are bound to see it on social media first, before they learn about such information on the nightly news or local radio station. The most significant reason for this is because social media no longer mainly lives on computers, but instead in the hand-held devices that almost every American owns, such as smart phones and tablets (Dimoro, 2015).

Social Media is also affecting not only how we see sports being promoted or how sports lovers receive breaking sports news, but it is also changing the way that sports fans see their favorite teams and athletes play in real time. Thanks to social media outlets such as Facebook, some sports organizations have begun to live stream their games as they take place for free on their own media pages. This is connecting more fans in more ways by accessing a media that is being richly used at this time. Twitter is even in negotiation with the NFL to have the broadcasting rights to air 10 live games in the coming seasons so fans can not only live tweet the games, but watch them as well (Rimmer, 2017). Social Media involvement in sports and connecting sports fans has not been limited to what one can see on a phone or computer screen, but has even found its way into the very arenas in which professional teams play. One up and coming social media company that has begun to connect fans that are already in the same location is Snaptivity. Snaptivity's purpose is to find a way to snap the perfect picture of in game action and fan reaction simultaneously, and share it across the internet for all to see (Rimmer, 2017). Below is an actual image that the company was able to capture during a soccer event, and as one can see it is truly capturing genuine emotion from actual fan reactions.



The social media company has already been used at 18 major sporting events during its very young lifespan and has been responsible for taking over 235,000 pictures from fans along with real time game action that have been plastered all over social media sites for the purpose of connecting fans and advertising the teams that were playing (Rimmer, 2017). Besides being able to capture specific moments of games with fans, or being able to stream live games, social media is also connecting people in the sports world by simply giving them a media outlet that lets them discuss their favorite sports together and gives them access to information that other fans might post. For example, there are dozens of websites all across the internet that are devoted to talking about one particular sport or even one single team. Fans all are able to talk back and forth to one another on these message boards as games are being played, as news breaks, or as developments occur.

Moving on from the fan perspective of how sports and social media have come together to make the impact that it has, sports and social media have also intertwined to create many different business endeavors as well. In fact, social media has become one of the primary sources

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of advertisement and promotion for businesses, whether they are sports related or not, due to the target audience that social media users present (Clapp, 2017). Social media has allowed sports teams and even individual athletes a new avenue of advertising that has created many new fans of sports brands, and it has also generated massive brand awareness through social media recognition as well. One feature that Twitter has used to its advantage in order to connect potential sports buyers to the companies that they purchase from is the creation of hashtags that represent a certain theme or response to a team or athlete. For example, the companies who created these hashtags might use the different Twitter users who have used the saying to enter them into contests, giveaways, or testimonial tweets that further explain why said user is such a fan of that organization or sports business, which in turn could attract the attention of more followers (Clapp, 2017).

Conclusion

In closing, after studying the many different areas of life that sports have impacted, it is apparent that sports are more of a cultural and financial phenomenon that continue to increase in importance to not only players and fans, but as well as the many companies involved in the sports world. Sports contribute to a multi-billion-dollar entertainment and merchandising industry, as well as bring people together through the unique ability to express stances on social issues such as race, health, and togetherness. Athletes become more than players in a game; they become childhood heroes, and teams become representatives of the thousands of people who support them. Thanks to sports, many areas of activism have received aid from athletes both on and off the playing fields, and awareness of what is going on culturally has been brought to the nation's attention. In conclusion, after covering the financial aspects, the various social issues that sports touch, the emotional and mental impacts that sports have on its fans, and even how

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sports continue to evolve through the use of social media, it is evident that there is more than just a game being played. There are lives being changed, businesses being developed, and people being brought together every day in America thanks to the power of sports.

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